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ABSTRACT

Various honors programs designed to stimulate the intellectual efforts of high ability students in community colleges are described. Among the programs described are: the College Level Examination Program (CLEP), which demonstrates previous educational achievements by providing a comprehensive measure of five basic areas: English, natural sciences, humanities, mathematics, and social sciences/history; the St. Petersburg Community College honors program; and the individual study program for high ability students. (SGM)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAMS FOR HIGH ABILITY STUDENTS

JC 740 189

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There was a time in higher education when the major focus was on the superior student. Scholarships were awarded to students having high grade point averages with little regard for financial need. These institutions were usually liberal arts in character and emphasized the classics. The twentieth century has seen major changes in higher education. The emphasis has changed from providing a classical education for a select few, to providing diverse educational programs for all segments of the American public. This by no means suggests that education is totally equalitarian, but significant moves in this direction have taken place. At no previous time in history have low ability students had a greater chance to succeed in college.

A central factor in the change in philosophy has been the development of the community-junior college. Monroe (1972) states that "by 1920 more was needed at the higher education level if more than the top quarter of high school graduates were to have a post-secondary education." Community colleges have developed in part as a result of this need. The following data from the SCOPE study reveal the community colleges commitment to provide opportunities to all who desire a higher education.

	Top Quartile	2nd Quartile	3rd Quartile	Low Quartile
4 year institution	59%	26%	11%	4%
2 year institution	20%	31%	32%	17%

(Tillery, Donovan & Sherman, 1966)

The data clearly shows that community colleges are serving students with a wide range of academic ability. This has been accomplished by a substantial

effort to build developmental programs which usually include: reading, composition, mathematics, and reading skills, (Medsker & Tillery, 1971). Although many educators are critical of developmental programs, one can not dispute the fact that more low ability students are finding success than in any previous time.

At this point a question arises in my mind as to whether or not the community college is truly meeting the needs of all students. General student ability can be roughly divided into three groups: high ability, average, and low ability. We have already established the community colleges commitment to average and low ability students. What opportunities are available to the high ability student? What happens to the high ability student, who makes up 20% of the average community college, when intellectual challenge is lacking in his program? Results of a study at St. Petersburg Junior College show, that out of 48 freshmen scoring higher than 450 on the Florida Twelfth Grade Placement Test, (highest possible score is 495), 13 finished the freshman year with a grade point average under 2.0 (A=4.0), and 19 finished with a GPA under 3.0, (Pollock, 1971). The lack of a substantial honors program was clearly a detriment to these students.

To gain a clearer understanding of the high ability student let's examine some of the reasons he or she attends a community college. Some students may wish to maintain close family ties, ie. parents who want to keep an eye on their children or older students unable to move away from their family (wife-children and job). From my own personal experience a significant percentage of honors students were over 25 and working part or full time to support their family. Some students may have a lack of

financial resources in spite of the broad financial aid programs available at most universities. As of now the demand for aid is still greater than the supply. Low tuition costs and savings from living at home often make community colleges very attractive. Research tells us that some students who are only average achievers in high school improve academically in college.

After a semester or so this student could benefit from participating in an honors program. Some students may be looking for a specific vocational program that is not readily available at the four year institution.

Examples include Mortuary Science at Miami-Dade Community College and Zoo Keeping at Santa Fe Community College. Some high ability high school students may be involved in an early entrance program before leaving home for a four year institution. Finally a host of personal reasons can influence a student to attend a community college, i.e., he or she wishes to stay near their boyfriend or girlfriend, interest in a specific geographic area, etc. In many cases no single reason can explain a student's decision to attend a community college, as a number of influences can be present at any one time.

Now that we've established the need for honors programs and have a general idea of the type of student we are dealing with, let's examine some specific programs. The College Level Examination Program (CLEP) is a method of demonstrating previous educational achievements by providing a comprehensive measure of five basic areas: English, natural sciences, humanities, mathematics, and social sciences-history. Besides giving college credit for work completed in high school, CLEP gives credit for military service experiences, television or correspondence courses, and

independent study. The tests are designed to measure knowledge and comprehension of basic facts, concepts, and principles in the five subject areas. The material covered corresponds to the freshman and sophomore years of college. Tests are developed by committees of specialists in each of the subject matter fields. (Sharon 1970).

Kreplin (1971) lists the following advantages of the CLEP program:

1. A saving of time in a students degree program. In some cases credit for the entire freshman year can be given by CLEP, thus shortening a two year degree to one year or a four year degree to three years.
2. Reduction of college costs. In many cases exam fees are lower than corresponding tuition for equal hours.
3. A possible saving of faculty time and institutional resources. Less sections of freshman classes need to be offered.
4. Enables students to avoid repetition of materials already covered.
5. Attracts more students to community colleges who could benefit from the exams, (an important factor when colleges are competing for students.)
6. Better articulation between high school and college curriculums.
7. Provides students with greater flexibility in choosing elective courses.

Allen (1972) describes the application of a CLEP program at Moraine Valley Community College. The program was divided into two areas: a community test center, and a seminar program. In most colleges a student takes the CLEP exam for that specific school. The philosophy at Moraine

Valley Community College was to test any member of the community regardless of their immediate plans or college preference. This allows community residents to check specific achievement whether they plan to enroll in college or not, and to obtain test results even if they apply to another school. The seminar program was a 13 week class meeting two hours per week, that "was established to prepare individuals to take the examinations through directed review." (Allen 1972). The seminar curriculum consisted of: test practice (using a preparation text), test analysis, study skill improvement, review guidance, and confidence building. Individuals who did not pass the CLEP began independent reading in weak areas as prescribed by a reviewing faculty member and/or signed up for courses that would provide additional background.

Honors classes comprise the next type of honors program we will examine. These are two main objectives for honors classes: "to challenge and stimulate bright students" and "to explore a field in depth," (Wolosin 1973). Students are challenged to use their full capacities by setting higher standards for coursework. Ideally, honors classes should be flexible enough to further specify student interests. Faculty commitment varies from some who are opposed on the grounds that students should not be segregated by ability, to other faculty who favor learning situations designed for each student's ability. Criteria for selection usually include: grade point average, faculty recommendations, and in some cases self-selection, (Wolosin 1973).

In a survey of honors program graduates between 1967-70 in Indiana, Wolosin (1972) reveals that:

1. 72.5% of the graduates involved are now attending or have attended and completed graduate or professional school - 87% of those students received some form of financial aide.
2. 77% of the respondents who are employed hold jobs in professional or technical categories.
3. Income levels are uniformly low, with 70.8% earning \$5,000 a year or less, (many because they are only employed part time while still in school).
4. Respondents consider themselves to be politically independent - 70.7% vote regularly.
5. The respondents evaluation of the honors program was uniformly positive with slight variation by major area.
6. Honors program graduates felt they were well prepared for their current activities.
7. 75% felt their honors work was superior to the regular program.

The results of this study seem to indicate that honors students continue in school after graduation and that most students felt some benefit from their program.

Pollock (1971) describes the specific honors program at St. Petersburg Community College. The aim of their program is qualitative rather than quantitative. Honors classes "should stimulate students to a higher plane of achievement rather than more of what regular sections do." Honors classes are taught as part of the general education program and include: English Composition I and II, American Government I & II, and Humanities. Selection for acceptance into the program was made on one of the following criteria: Florida Twelfth Grade Placement Test, rank in

graduating class or teacher/faculty recommendation.

Etchison (1973) describes the honors program at Grand View College, Des Moines, Iowa. The program is unique in that it allows students "to take their junior year, in certain major areas of study, at the junior college."

Transfer to cooperating institutions is achieved with no loss of credit. The first year deals with foundations courses. The second year broadens this foundation and the third year is concerned with concentration and integration using seminar courses. Areas of study include: English, history, sociology, biology, political science, education, and speech. Admission to the program is determined by class rank or ACT scores, or grade point average. Close faculty contact and financial savings were seen as advantages of this system.

Another major program for high ability students are honor societies. The major community junior college honorary society recognized by the AACJC is Phi Theta Kappa. Founded in 1918 "the constitution states the purpose of Phi Theta Kappa is promotion of scholarship, development of leadership and service and cultivation of fellowship among the students of junior colleges of the United States," (Phi Theta Kappa 1969). At present four hundred chapters are represented in over forty states. Activities at the Miami-Dade Community College - South campus included: annual honors day program, outstanding professor award, scholarship awards, transfer articulation, speaker's forum, and tutoring program. Honor societies give superior students an identity on campus, providing activities and opportunities for community service.

Tutoring comprises still another program for high ability students. Each community college has an ample supply of students who need individual assistance with particular courses. Superior students who have some measure of expertise in a particular field, review assignments, supplement textual and lecture materials and answer questions. Tutors are qualified by virtue of their mastery of the subject matter and their personal experience with the class. Tutors can be granted credit for their efforts, paid by work study or campus funds, or participate on a strictly volunteer basis. Johnson (1969) describes a tutoring program at Okaloosa - Walton Junior College. High ability students are recommended by the faculty for the program where they receive one unit of credit per semester in "Tutorial Honors." Each tutor works two hours per week and keeps a log of each student's progress. Grades are assigned for the tutors in relation to the quality of their work. Both the tutors and students benefit from the program with the tutor increasing his knowledge and the student gaining an additional learning resource.

The next program we will examine is the New York College Proficiency Examination. CPE was created to expand educational opportunities in New York to individuals who had acquired college-level knowledge in ways other than regular classroom attendance. Two of the most important uses of CPE is its ability to evaluate undergraduate independent study, and the above average high school students. Exams are designed to test factual knowledge and the student's ability to use that knowledge effectively. The format may include multiple choice, short answer, essay, and problem questions. The credit granted varies depending on the particular exam and the college granting credit, (State University of New York, Albany 1970)

CPE differs from CLEP in its inclusion of Nursing and Business categories and its participation in the New York State External Degree Program. Degrees granted in this program include: Associate of Arts, Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, and Associate in Applied Science in Nursing. Credits are earned by passing CPE as equivalent exams, and/or attending regular classes. The state of New Jersey began a similar program in 1972 utilizing CLEP exams, (College Entrance Examination Board 1973).

The last program for high ability students we will examine will be individual study. Sharon (1971) defines independent study as, "formal out-of-classroom learning by ... students enrolled in a degree program. Types of individual study include:

1. Directed reading - exploring a given subject in relatively great depth.
2. Research projects on a specific topic
3. A combination of activities under faculty guidance and direction.
4. Work experience in industry or business .
5. A community service project - combination of theory and practice.

Independent study programs offer an extremely high degree of flexibility in meeting student needs.

Brick and McGrath(1971) reveal that in a survey of curricular innovations in institutions of higher education, 66% of the institutions offered independent study to superior students. From their research the strong points of individual study programs are :

1. Improves problem solving abilities.
2. Fosters self discipline
3. Provides closer interaction between faculty and students.
4. Practical experience - research and work study.
5. Increased maturity.

Conclusion

It becomes obvious after examining these various programs that these are certain general needs that are common to most high ability students, i.e., challenge, flexibility, contact with faculty, etc. The programs reviewed are not without shortcomings. Problems include: some faculty and students are not willing to spend the necessary time and effort to produce worthwhile results, individualized instruction is expensive when compared to more traditional teaching methods, poor publicity causes lack of visibility of honors programs, three year degree problems conflict with community college philosophy, some faculty question the validity of CLEP exams, and some programs offer no continuity between departments or divisions. In my opinion the advantages of honors programs far outweigh the disadvantages. Besides the specific advantages for each program mentioned in the body of this paper, the following statements represent strong points of honors programs in general:

1. With the greater competition for students that we now face - colleges who have honors programs would be more attractive to high ability students.

2. Most superior students can work closer to their total learning potential through involvement in an honors program.

If community colleges are to live up to their philosophy of meeting the needs of all students, then programs must be available for high ability as well as average and low ability students. To suggest that our colleges encourage mediocrity is to compromise our future and the goals of post secondary education.

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